Toxic Shock Syndrome
And Tampons

Tampons have been associated with toxic shock syndrome, a newly recognized, though rare, disease that seems to strike mainly women under 30 years of age during their menstrual periods.

Toxic shock syndrome can strike quickly and may be fatal.

Women who use tampons and experience the following flu-like symptoms during their periods should remove the tampon at once and see a doctor immediately:

- A high fever (usually 102° or higher) that comes on suddenly.
- Vomiting or diarrhea.

Within half a day, there may be dizziness or a sudden drop in blood pressure that can lead to shock. Often, patients need to be taken to a hospital to be treated, but, in any case, *the disease must be treated very quickly.*

There may be other symptoms, such as severe muscle aches, bloodshot eyes, or a sore throat. Also, a sunburn-like rash may appear; in a few days it will start to peel, particularly on the hands and feet.

Women can almost entirely avoid getting this disease by not using tampons. Or they can reduce their risk by alternating sanitary napkins with tampons within each day of their periods (when removing a tampon, replace it with a sanitary napkin, and vice versa).

Here is more detailed information about this disease:

Toxic shock syndrome is caused by the bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus*. The bac-

terium produces a toxin, or poison, that is absorbed into the bloodstream and causes the disease.

Whether the disease is caused by a new strain of *Staph* bacteria, or whether the disease has been around a long time but was never identified before, we do not yet know.

No one knows exactly why tampons are associated with toxic shock syndrome, although many reasons have been suggested. The Government continues to investigate, as do the manufacturers.

All tampons have been associated with cases of toxic shock syndrome. One brand, Rely, was associated more than other brands in two studies done in September 1980 and the manufacturer voluntarily withdrew it.

The risk of getting TSS is low. Studies have found it affects between 3 and 15 out of every 100,000 menstruating women per year.

Patients suffering from toxic shock syndrome are usually placed in intensive care units, given large amounts of fluids intravenously to combat dehydration, and treated with drugs to help raise their blood pressure.

Antibiotics—drugs usually used against infections caused by bacteria—do not appear to be effective in curing toxic shock syndrome. But antibiotics may be helpful in preventing the disease from occurring again.

Toxic shock syndrome recurs in about

three out of every ten women. Those who have had the disease should not use tampons until they have checked with their physicians. One thing the doctor can do is to determine whether the bacterial infection is still present.

At this time, there is no evidence that the disease is contagious.

Toxic Shock Syndrome and Sea Sponges

To date, two cases of toxic shock syndrome have been reported in women using natural sea sponges as an alternative to manufactured tampons. The Food and Drug Administration has not approved natural sea sponges for use as tampons because their safety and effectiveness have not yet been demonstrated. FDA considers sponges, when used as tampons, to be a "significant risk investigational device," which means that they can be used for this purpose only in medical studies.

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